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A NEW PACIFIC RACE OF GULL-BILLED TERN

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Gull-billed Terns were first recorded from the Pacific coast of North America in 1859. Xantus took two specimens that year near Cape San Lucas in Lower California¹. Somewhat later, in 1863, Salvin reported the birds as "common" in February at Chiapam (=Champerico), Guatemala². A few years afterwards, about 1869, Sumichrast took them, in August and February, at San Mateo in Oaxaca³. With the exception of one specimen from Ecuador⁴ in 1911, nothing further was learned of Gull-billed Terns on the American side of the Pacific Ocean until 1927. That year a breeding colony was discovered in the Salton Sea in California⁵.

Interested by the fact that the eggs found at the Salton Sea were larger than those taken along the Atlantic coast, I borrowed a series of skins for comparison. I take pleasure in acknowledging the thanks due Dr. Louis B. Bishop, the Bureau of Biological Survey, Mr. Donald R. Dickey, for the use both of skins and library, the Museum of Comparative Zoology, the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Dr. L. J. Peters, especially for his selection of specimens, and the United States National Museum.

¹ GRINNELL, Lower California Ornithology, 1928, p. 61.

² COUES, Ibis, 1864, p. 189.

³ LAWRENCE, Bull. U. S. National Museum, No. 4, 1876, p. 51.

⁴ HARTERT, Novit. Zool. IX, 1902, p. 605.

⁵ PEMBERTON, Condor, XXIX, 1927, pp. 253-258.

Upon assembling the birds into geographical groups, it became apparent that those from the Salton Sea did not coincide with any of the races that have been described. The Australian *Gelochilidon nilotica macrotarsa* is almost, if not quite, entitled to full specific recognition because of its relatively immense size. I did not have the opportunity of making a personal examination of *G. n. affinis* of India, but the characters ascribed to it by Mathews⁶ rendered a comparison unnecessary. On the coast of China we find *G. n. addenda* with a tail which, even in fresh plumage, is decidedly lighter than the back. So much so, indeed, that in this respect the bird of Foochow approaches *G. n. macrotarsa*.

On the Atlantic we find the small *G. n. aranea* in North America and the larger *G. n. nilotica* in Europe. The Brazilian and Argentinian form, *G. n. grönvoldi*, is, logically, intermediate between these two. It combines the small bill of the former with the large tarsus and general size of the latter. Birds of California, curiously, most closely approach *G. n. nilotica*, but their separation is clearly shown by shorter tails and by larger and differently shaped bills.

Of the specimens from the Pacific side of Latin America I have been able to examine but one. That bird, taken by Sumichrast on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in 1869, is clearly of the same race as those from the Imperial Valley. I feel justified in including with it the other western North and Central American examples, by inference.

Gelochelidon nilotica vanrossemi, subsp. nov.

VAN ROSSEM GULL-BILLED TERN⁷

Type.—Male adult, breeding; no. 22,838, collection of Donald R. Dickey; Salton Sea, Imperial County, California, May 21, 1928. Collected by A. J. Van Rossem, original number 12,278.

Subspecific characters.—Nearest to *Gelochilidon nilotica nilotica* (Gmelin) of Europe, from which it differs in shorter tail and less acute angle at gonys. Differs from *Gelochilidon nilotica aranea* (Wilson) of eastern North America in decidedly larger size throughout.

⁶ Birds of Australia, 1912, Vol. II, 330.

⁷ The bird is named for Mr. A. J. VanRossem of Pasadena in appreciation both of his contributions to the ornithology of western North America and of the long continued and interested assistance he has given to the studies of the author.

Range.—Confined to the American side of the Pacific Ocean. It is known to breed in the Salton Sea, California, and to occur, probably in migration, along the western coast of Mexico as far south as the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and probably to Guatemala and Ecuador.

Remarks.—Nothing is known of the history of these birds beyond the meagre facts that have been outlined. Since the present Salton Sea has not been in existence for more than a few decades, the birds clearly must have wandered in from some other habitat.

Specimens examined.—*G. n. nilotica*: Europe, 2; Africa, 1. *G. n. macrotarsa*: Australia, 1. *G. n. addenda*: China, 5. *G. n. grönvoldi*: South America, 3. *G. n. aranea*: eastern North America and Bahamas, 21. *G. n. vanrossemi*: California (type locality), 11; Gulf of Tehuantepec, 1.

(Table of Measurements over)

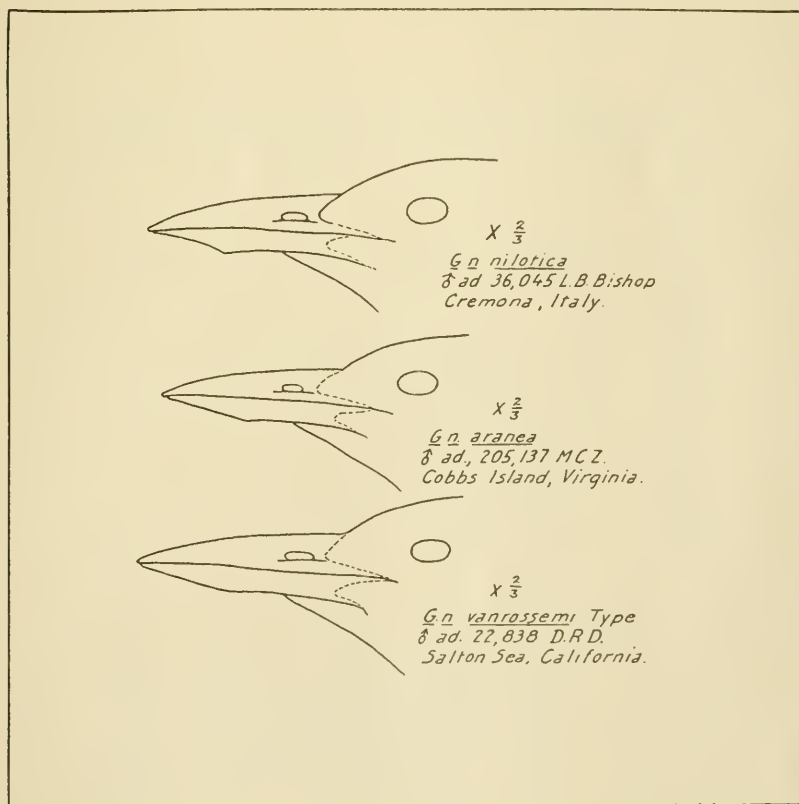


TABLE OF MEASUREMENTS (EXTREMES AND AVERAGES)

	Wing	Tail	Exposed culmen	Depth of bill at angle of gonyx	Depth of bill at base	Tarsus	Middle toe without claw
<i>G. n. aranea</i> :							
10 males from eastern No. America	292-310 300	106-123 115	36.7-38.6 37.6	8.9-10.2 9.6	11.8-13.2 12.4	29.2-32.0 30.5	19.5-21.6 20.4
<i>G. n. aranea</i> :							
11 females from eastern No. America	283-300 293	106-120 111	34.3-38.0 36.1	8.8-10.2 9.5	11.0-13.0 12.1	28.6-31.6 30.2	19.2-21.0 20.1
<i>G. n. grönwaldi</i> :							
3 specimens from Brazil and Argentina	295-315 305	119-122 121	36.0-38.0 37.2	9.7-10.0 9.8	12.6-13.0 12.9	31.2-34.3 32.8	21.0-22.0 21.6
<i>G. n. nilotica</i> :							
3 specimens from Europe and Africa	310-312 311	132-132 132	39.7-41.0 40.2	9.5-10.0 9.8	12.2-14.0 12.9	33.4-35.9 34.9	22.3-24.5 23.3
<i>G. n. vanrossemi</i> :							
7 males from the Salton Sea	303-315 311	107-123 117	40.0-43.3 41.3	10.7-11.5 11.0	12.6-14.0 13.4	32.1-35.0 33.7	21.5-22.4 21.8
<i>G. n. vanrossemi</i> :							
4 females from the Salton Sea	290-295 293	102-114 108	39.3-41.4 40.1	10.3-10.8 10.5	12.6-13.3 12.9	33.5-34.7 34.0	20.4-22.5 21.2